

SEVENTH EDITION

BROADCAST/CABLE

# COPYWRITING

PETER B. ORLIK

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**PETER B. ORLIK**

*Central Michigan University*



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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Orlik, Peter B.

Broadcast/cable copywriting / Peter B. Orlik. — 7th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-205-39324-1

1. Broadcasting—Authorship. 2. Broadcast advertising. I. Title.

PN1990.9.A88O7 2004

808'.066791--dc21

2002038648

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

08 07 06 05 04 03

To  
*Chris, Darcy, and Blaine*

*and to*

*My Mom, Ruth Orlik, and  
Aunt, Blanche MacLean,  
who departed this life during  
the creation of this edition*

Some writers are motivated by their profession's artistic challenges. Others are energized by its financial incentives. Broadcast/cable copywriting offers the stimulating opportunity to have it both ways: to experience constantly evolving tests of your verbal artistry and personal eccentricities while enjoying significant monetary rewards for successfully passing those tests. "Copywriting," confesses creative director Steve Hayden, "is perhaps the only non-criminal activity that allows you to make a comfortable living off your character defects."<sup>1</sup>

Whether you are an experienced media professional seeking to hone the character of your writing or a novice wordsmith striving to secure employment in the electronic media, this book is designed for you.

*Broadcast/Cable Copywriting*, Seventh Edition, introduces you to the special requirements and pitfalls of creating the continuity, commercials, and off-air presentations that are the life's blood of the electronic communication profession. Unlike the limited-access world of full-length entertainment and documentary script creation, **electronic media copywriting** is a widespread enterprise that requires many thousands of practitioners. It is a function that every local outlet must perform; an activity in which every advertising, public relations, marketing, and other corporate entity communicating via electronic pathways must engage. And it is the same fundamental skill now being exploited on the superhighways of the Internet.

Despite their comparative brevity, our continuity pieces exemplify all the requisites of media form and content that electronic journalism and feature-length entertainment programming demand. Thus, guided exposure to the elements of the copywriter's repertoire will simultaneously acquaint you with the stylistic techniques you'll need if you are aspiring to a career in newswriting or program creation.

On the other hand, like many wordsmiths before you, you may discover that the opportunity, the compensation, and the challenging diversity of *copywriting* are difficult to abandon in favor of the more sober environment of the newsroom or the much less secure world of long-form program writing. Do not be surprised if you decide to spend your *entire career* as a copywriter and/or continuity supervisor, creative services manager, or agency creative director.

Over the years, electronic media copywriting has become much more than the audio/visual hawking of goods. Audiences now view the best commercials as entertainment in their own right, with entire television specials built to showcase the copywriter's art. And like any art, copywriting requires continuous training. "Writing," Professor Dennis Brown reminds us, "is not like riding a bicycle, a skill which if learned once is not forgotten. It is more

like music—we must practice constantly not just to improve but to maintain our competence.”<sup>2</sup> *Broadcast/Cable Copywriting*, Seventh Edition, strives to assist in such productive practice.

As in the previous editions, this volume is divided into four main parts. After an appraisal of the copywriting marketplace (Chapter 1) and how our jobs reflect communication process considerations (Chapter 2), Part One continues with an inventory of the tools (Chapter 3), human motivations (Chapter 4), and audience characteristics (Chapter 5) that the writer must learn to manage. Part One concludes by examining copy creativity, definition, and validation as well as prominent regulatory and stylistic constraints (Chapter 6). This first section thereby sets the stage for Part Two, which probes radio’s key elements (Chapter 7), commercials (Chapter 8), and additional endeavors (Chapter 9). The parallel Part Three then uses a similar chapter trio (Chapters 10, 11, and 12) in the exploration of television. Finally, Part Four delves into the interlocking process of campaign construction; first, for the more specialized world of public service appeals (Chapter 13), and then for electronic media marketing as a whole (Chapter 14).

Throughout the book, a great many rules and precepts are advanced. Even though each has been tested time and time again in the intensely competitive electronic media, each (except for those ordained by government or industry regulations) can also be broken, given a specific and unique set of circumstances. Knowing the general rules, however, ensures that when you do decide to ignore one, your decision is not inadvertent but is based on a careful, conscious, and calculated appraisal of why this proven principle does not apply to the assignment at hand.

You are cautioned not to view the separate chapters of this book as independent and self-standing wholes. Do not, for example, think that you will acquire all of the information pertinent to writing *radio commercials* simply by reading the chapter bearing that title. Instead, the fourteen chapters in this Seventh Edition are mutually supportive. Each contributes additional perspectives to what is covered in others. Thus, guidelines introduced in conjunction with television *commercials* are at least partially applicable to *public service announcement* writing, and vice versa. In the constantly mutating world of electronic copy, nothing remains totally distinct for very long.

Like the six previous editions, this latest version of *Broadcast/Cable Copywriting* deepens your comprehension of the subject through numerous examples and illustrations. Many of these models are quite current. Others are more historic and are featured because they have made enduring contributions to the practice of effective electronic communication.

It is especially gratifying to be able to include samples contributed by many of my former students (in order of appearance): Christopher Conn, Dan Nelson, Tim Swies, Anthony Clark, Karl Bastian, Phil Tower, Paul Boscarino, Brad Maki, Jerry Downey, Susan Montgomery, John Schroeder, and Catherine (Jenkins) Abate. These true professionals have firmly established themselves in the communications business and continue to excel there as they did in the

classroom we once shared. They epitomize what advertising legend Walter Weir testified a half century ago: "Your copy, more than you realize, is you: and you are what you believe."<sup>3</sup>

Before we begin our journey into the copywriter's world, one housekeeping announcement. In an effort to increase the number of examples while still keeping the length of the book manageable, we have condensed the format of the sample scripts. IN ACTUAL PRACTICE, ALL COPY SEGMENTS THAT ARE SINGLE-SPACED IN THIS BOOK NORMALLY WOULD BE DOUBLE-SPACED, AND ALL COPY HEREIN DOUBLE-SPACED WOULD BE TRIPLE-SPACED.

Now, let's proceed, in the words of creative director Curvin O'Reilly, to "*Have some fun*. Despite all signs to the contrary, advertising is still the toy department of the business world. Enjoy."<sup>4</sup>

## A NOTE TO MY ACADEMIC COLLEAGUES

Thank you for considering this text. It was originally conceived three decades ago at my students' urging. I subsequently discovered, as did *Tuesdays with Morrie* author Mitch Albom, that "Sometimes you write a book to teach others and wind up teaching yourself."<sup>5</sup> I hope some of the things my students taught me have been adequately expressed in the chapters that follow.

A separate *Instructor's Manual* provides a model syllabus, a sample of industry copy-acceptance guidelines, and a series of Suggested Exercises designed to apply the techniques this Seventh Edition presents. The *Instructor's Manual* is available directly from Allyn and Bacon at no charge to text adopters.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I thank my wife, Chris, for her eternal belief in this project and its author, as well as for her patience, understanding, and continuous encouragement during the evolution of all seven editions of this book.

Appreciation is also expressed to the many professionals in the electronic media and publishing industries who collectively provided the wealth of script and other illustrative material for this Seventh Edition of *Broadcast/Cable Copywriting*. Many of their names appear in the text following the copy or other creative achievements they made available.

Gratitude is also extended to Allyn and Bacon's Mass Communication Acquisitions Editor, Molly Taylor, whose tenacity and support won the "green light" for this latest edition. On the production side, Grace Sheldrick of Wordsworth Associates has, for the sixth time, provided the editorial support and design expertise that are essential to the accurate publishing of a complicated manuscript package. In addition, I want to thank the following reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions: Frank Barnas/Valdosta



State University; Joseph E. Burns/Southeastern Louisiana University; Anthony Brian Corea, Ohio University/Southern; and M. William Johnson/University of Wisconsin, Whitewater.

Finally, deep appreciation goes to our two children, Darcy and Blaine, who have grown up with this three-decades project and put up with all of its distractions. In spite of their father, both are now building their own successful careers as marketing professionals.

Thank *you*, the reader, for your company, as we now explore the specific components and techniques of electronic media copywriting. Our ultimate goal is to help you to capture those elusive best ideas in a client-benefiting way. This is anything but easy. "A good ad is a greased pig when it comes time to put your hands on one," observes veteran wordsmith Mark Fenske. "Masters of disguise, good ads sneak out of you in bars, the shower, dreams, even in advertising meetings, and run away to lost pages in your workbook or torn up sheets in office wastebaskets."<sup>6</sup> In the chapters that follow, let's see if we can't learn to construct nets that snag the little buggers before they escape forever.

P. B. O.



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author and ad agency owner Lois Wyse puts it, both novels and pieces of copy “require the ability to express ideas in succinct, powerful and caring terms.”<sup>2</sup> But merely “having the urge to write doesn’t necessarily make you a writer,” adds Professor Howard Good. “Writing requires attention, discipline, and a strong backside.”<sup>3</sup>

Assuming *your* backside is hardy, study and practice in the contexts and techniques of copywriting can pay significant professional dividends whatever your own long-term expressive goals may be. This is because the copywriting craft “involves a knowledge of language, visual imagery and, most important, the human psyche,” points out agency executive Bob Cox. “Much of this is instinctive, but the rest must be learned.”<sup>4</sup> Pursuing such learning is anything but tedious. For advertising professionals in general, and copywriters in particular, “it’s quite a laboratory we work in,” marvels agency CEO Charlotte Beers. “We’re required to go to plays, concerts, see movies, sit in bars, read, listen and enjoy great diversity of human beings. Not a bad job description.”<sup>5</sup>

Most of this book strives to further assist this comprehensive learning process through a focus on proven copy procedures and techniques. In the next few pages, however, we examine the major employment contexts from which copy is generated. In preparing to enter any business, it helps to know how you fit in to the various ways in which that business can be organized.

## FREELANCE

This term has a decidedly mercenary origin. It was first applied to warriors too poor or unaccomplished to have their own land or liege lord. They hired themselves and their lances out to anyone who would employ them in order to establish a reputation and accumulate a little wealth. Set designer Dane Krogman recounts that the Duke of Argyll organized freelancers when he unified the Scots against the English. “But it didn’t do any good. They got beaten and went back to being lances for hire. It’s the same thing for anybody who’s a freelancer today—you’re true and loyal to whoever’s paying you the most money for that particular day.”<sup>6</sup>

Freelancing is one way for young copywriters to test, even on a part-time basis, their ability to create marketplace material that successfully serves a commissioned need. Initially, this might be constructing anything from public service spots for the local YMCA to commercials promoting a home-town merchant. Ultimately, if such small assignments are successfully dispatched, the freelancer may move beyond writing to become a one-person advertising agency: “pitching” area business folk on the need for radio and television exposure, creating the commercials, supervising their production, and even handling the actual time buys on stations and cable systems. Part-time freelancing is a prudent way for the fledgling writer, like the obscure warrior, to fashion a reputation and make a little money before attempting to slay the



fiercer dragons lurking in full-time employment and comprehensive media campaigns.

For seasoned writers, too, freelancing on a full- or part-time basis can be professionally, psychologically, and economically satisfying. As veteran writer Susie Burtch testifies: "You don't have to hold the client's hand or be on the phone all day. I earn a full-time salary, there's no overhead, I'm my own boss and set my own hours. And as far as I'm concerned, you just can't get a better deal."<sup>7</sup> "Many freelancers do not want a full-time job," observes McCann-Erickson WorldGroup chief creative officer Marcio Moreira. "They prefer being able to choose assignments, work from home, manage their own time. Some do not thrive when confronted with the inner workings of agency life."<sup>8</sup>

In recent times, freelancing by senior creatives has been given a further boost by the twin business trends of outsourcing and downsizing. "A few years ago you called in freelancers to do the stuff you didn't want to do," says creative executive Court Crandall. "Now you call them in when you want something good."<sup>9</sup> Gary Gusick, whose The Ad Network provides freelancers on a project basis, adds that "most of today's new business presentations are being done by freelancers, mainly because agencies can't keep talent like they used to."<sup>10</sup> "Agencies have figured it out," chimes in Kit Mill, president of Paladin Freelancers. "Hire for valleys and use freelancers for the peaks."<sup>11</sup> Now, for a price ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,500 a day, agencies and their clients can hire top writers who have left agency careers to strike out on their own. Thus, "freelancing has become not only respectable, but a preferred, even fashionable way of life," states industry reporter Ann Cooper. "Agencies are offering freelancers more and more choice assignments."<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, when a freelancer hits a dry spell, there is no continuing paycheck to fall back on. Therefore, observes industry commentator Alison Rogers, "the personality traits common among the most successful freelancers are quick-wittedness for the busy times and optimism for the slow times."<sup>13</sup> Even under the best of conditions, cash flow and work flow are uneven; and this problem can be compounded by clients who are quick to issue deadlines but slow to pay your invoice. In addition, freelancers often "are not kept around to finish the work they begin," asserts freelancer Steve Smith. "As a result, the work often suffers, the client suffers and the freelancer suffers. The client doesn't get the execution from the people who understand it best. The freelancer doesn't get the work to put in his or her book."<sup>14</sup>

To circumvent these difficulties, some freelancers choose to specialize in a given product or media category. They become experts in agricultural or high-tech or health-care accounts. They learn how to use radio to promote financial services. Or they develop specialized skill in fashioning website narration, trade-show scripts, or video training tapes.

Still, despite such precautions, freelancing may end up as full-time anxiety for part-time pay and zero recognition. Mark Fenske, one of the best-known freelancers in the business, comments that "Freelance creative is just like having a regular agency job, except the money's not as good, you don't get the good

projects, your work is not your own, you've got nowhere to sit and there's no vacation time. Since my life's ambition is to be a scorned, ignored and self-tormented artist, it's been perfect for me."<sup>15</sup>

Whether on a full-time or part-time basis, freelancing clearly has its pitfalls as well as its prizes. Therefore, given the option, many copywriters do not freelance. They conclude that they acquire fewer bruises when they fight today's creative battles as a full-fledged member of the corporate team. Nevertheless, a number of agencies and client in-house advertising departments continue to rely on freelancers who must be paid only when needed and who don't consume expensive fringe benefits. As Charles Kent, founder of freelance provider Creative on Call, observes, "Right now, most agencies and their clients have cut personnel so far to reduce costs that they are looking outside to handle each new creative project or even major pitch."<sup>16</sup>

## ADVERTISING AGENCY

At the opposite end of the spectrum from solitary freelancing is a copywriting slot in a large, multifaceted advertising agency. Here, you need not worry about soliciting assignments, procuring artwork, paying the phone bill, or finding a photocopy machine. Here, account executives attend to clients, art directors help with layouts and storyboards, creative directors provide a steady stream of assignments, and a variety of support staff assist with word processing and overall project execution.

Agency life is what most people visualize when they think of copywriting. Much popular sociology, and not a few theatrical movies, are fixated on the foibles of the slickly dressed agency scribe who spouts catchy clichés and snappy slogans that would sour in the mouth of a backwoods con artist. Contrary to this conniving stereotype, asserts Ketchum Advertising's Jim Colasurdo, "In reality, copywriters are the ones in threadbare clothing or stylishly self-conscious 'I'm OK, you're OK' garb that can only be classified as 'Early Earth Shoe.' Nothing fits right, and sometimes even socks don't match. Many have the confidence of baby seals just before the hunters close in."<sup>17</sup>

Whatever their true demeanor, agency copywriters tend to be among the top professionals in their field from the twin standpoints of talent and take-home pay. In most cases, they have had to prove themselves in one or more other media jobs before an advertising agency would even consider hiring them as wordsmiths. During 2002, for instance, the average base salary for copywriters ranged from approximately \$51,000 at small agencies to \$64,500 at large shops.<sup>18</sup> Even the low end of this range was twice the compensation made by many copywriters working at radio stations. As these numbers suggest, clients—and advertising agencies themselves—expect that agency writers are all highly skilled and valued accordingly.

Assuming that you do make it into an agency creative department either directly or, more probably, via the freelance, in-station or other apprenticeship